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This paper is a preliminary report on The University of Southern Mississippi's 2009 field season at Winterville Mounds in the Mississippi Delta. Work this past summer included shovel-testing and a test unit in the northeastern portion of the plaza, a test excavation on the summit of Mound B, and excavation on and around Mound C, one of the few extant mounds at the site that other than C B Moore's test holes, had not received archaeological attention.

By way of background, Winterville Mounds, located north of Greenville Mississippi in Washington County, is a large Mississippi Period mound group, originally including as many as 23 mounds, and depending on how one counts, nine to twelve of which still exist at the Winterville Mounds Historical Site maintained by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Figure 1). The site was first occupied during the late Coles Creek Crippen Point phase, ca. AD 1000-1200. Mound construction began ca. AD 1200 in the subsequent Winterville phase. The site remained occupied until sometime after 1500. Accumulating evidence indicates occupation into the protohistoric Wasp Lake phase.

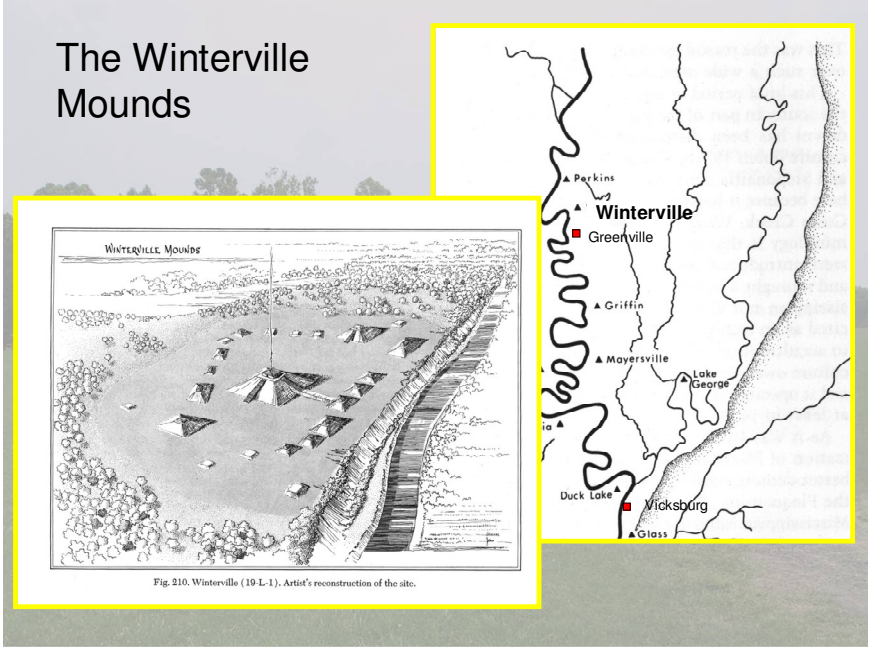

Figure 1. Winterville Mounds

We'll describe briefly our investigations in the northeast plaza and on Mound B, and then focus on Mound C which received the majority of attention in 2009. We are still inventorying artifacts, and sorting sherds, so results presented here are preliminary in nature.

Shovel-testing in the northeast plaza was predicated on 2006 gradiometer survey carried out by Bryan Haley of the University of Mississippi (Figure 2), which showed a fairly high density of small anomalies that were interpreted as possible pits.

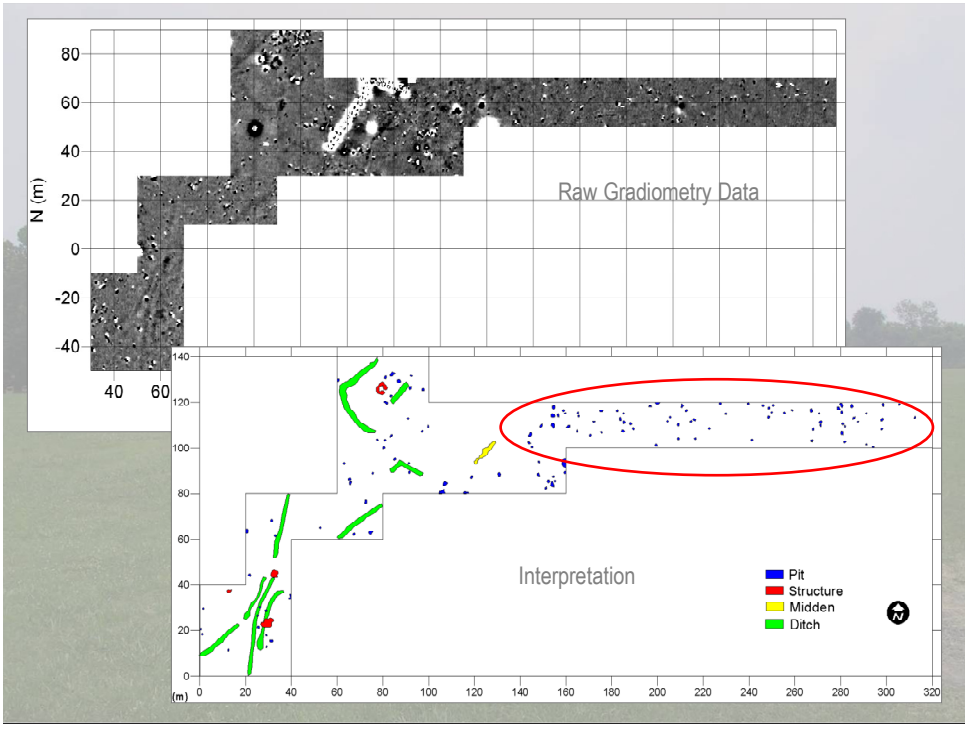

Figure 2. 2006 remote sensing

Our expectation was that we would be able to demonstrate some level of occupation in this portion of the site. Shovel Tests were excavated on a 10 meter grid. In contrast to expectations, shovel tests produced little material, except those that were excavated to depths in excess of 50 cm. We used a posthole digger to more systematically retrieve samples from deeper depths, and in the area between mounds A and J encountered an artifact bearing stratum nearly a meter deep. (Figure 3). A single one by one meter unit was excavated to get a better idea of stratigraphy which went down to 170 cm below surface (Figure 4). Our results indicate that at least in this area of the site, as much as 130 cm of artificial fill was deposited to level or raise the plaza. It overlies a probably pre-mound construction midden that appears to date to the Crippen Point phase, although we have not yet completed our analysis of the ceramics.

Figure 3. Shovel testing in northeast plaza.

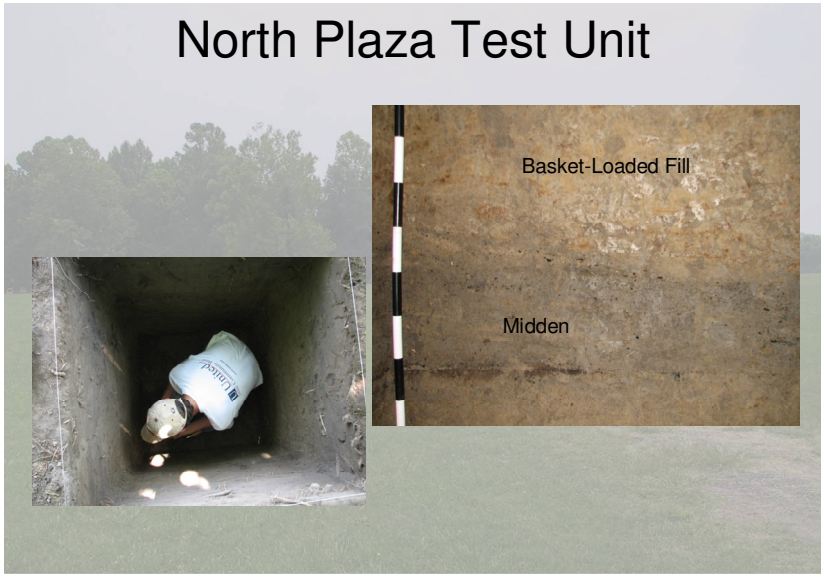

Figure 4. North Plaza Test Unit.

Our mound B testing took advantage of the park's recent effort to clear the mound of underbrush so it could be planted in sod (Figure 5). We had mapped the mound the previous spring and noted daub on the margins of the summit suggesting a burned structure fairly near the surface. Those familiar with Jeffrey Brain's earlier investigations at Winterville will remember that on the flanks of Mound B a number of Winterville phase (?) burials were encountered, suggesting that Mound B may have served as the platform of a mortuary facility. A series of soil probes were excavated across the summit of the mound, which revealed a concentration of daub on the western side. Two one by two meter units were begun, with the more westerly one encountering the corners of three superimposed burned floors each separated by approximately 20 cm of fill. Time prevented us from extending the excavation to trace the floors.

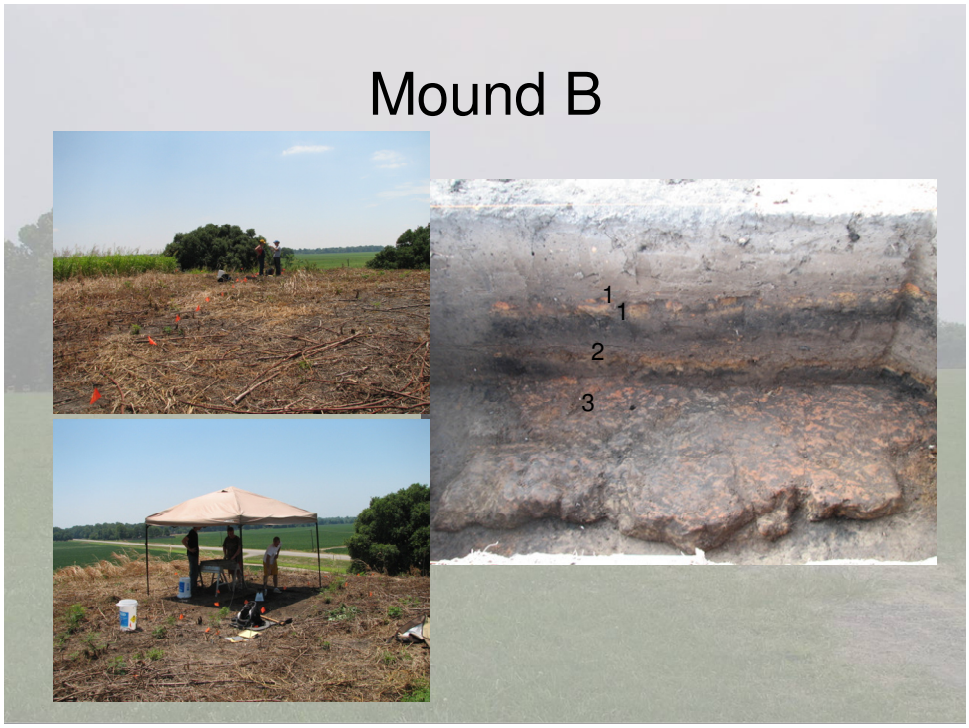

Figure 5. Mound B Test Unit 2.

Our major effort in 2009 was concentrated on Mound C (Figure 6). Excavation units were intended to gather samples from apparent mound flank deposits that had been provisionally identified through shovel testing in 2007, deposits we hoped would represent residues relating to the function of the mound. In its present morphology, Mound C is not typical of Mississippian mounds. It is elliptical in shape with a long narrow summit oriented on the axis of the northwest line of mounds. A second odd feature of the mound is what appears to be a low platform or apron that juts from its the north side. While this could be an intentional platform, it might also have been a consequence of erosion or slumping.

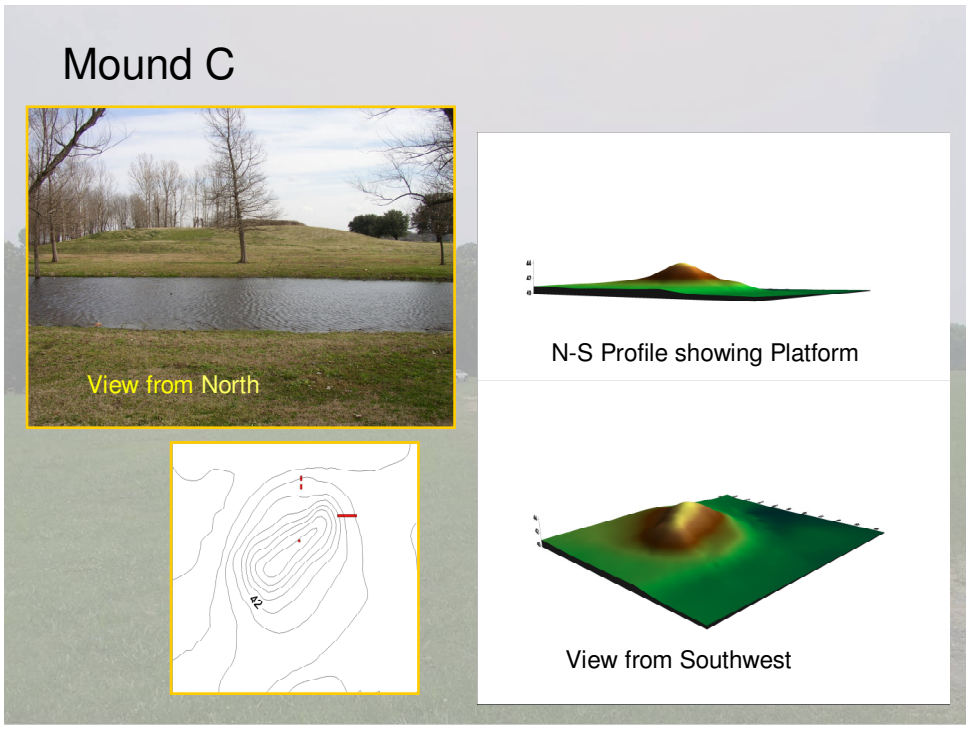

Figure 6. Mound C.

This configuration is documented with our total station map of the mound, but it is also clear in Albert Spaulding's 1949 plane table map of the site, and is also evident in C.B. Moore's 1907 sketch map (Figure 7).

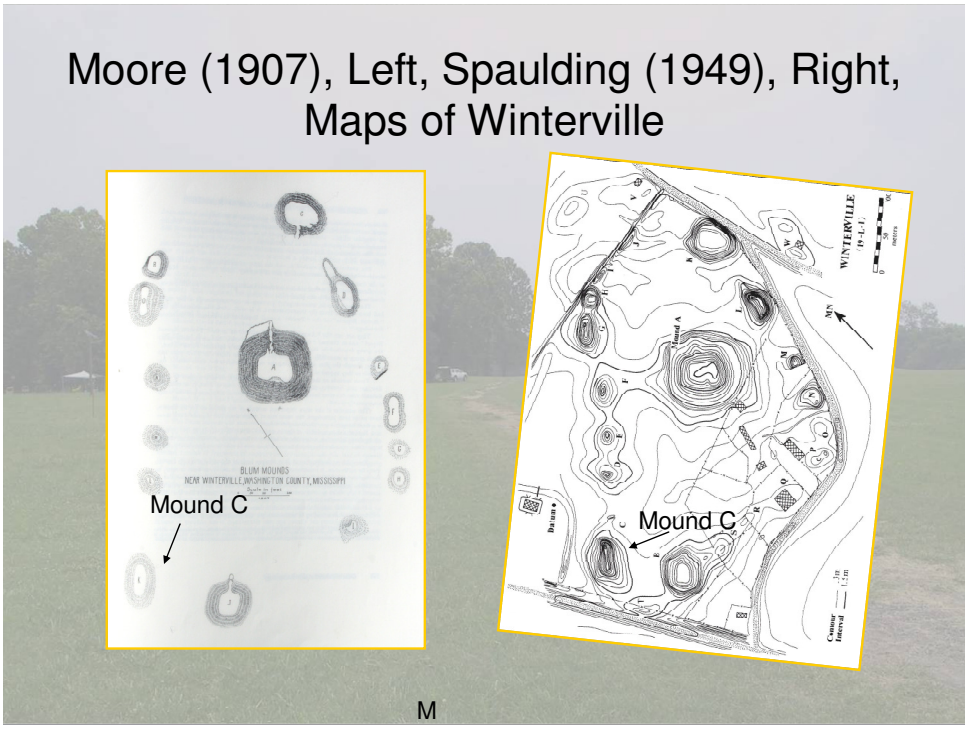

Figure 7. Early maps of Winterville.

Since the primary objective of our investigation of Mound C was to collect samples from associated midden, we began excavation units on the north and east flanks, where shovel testing in 2007 had indicated such deposits were likely to be (Figure 8). On the north flank we placed two one by two meter units separated by 2 meters 9 (Figure 9). Here we hoped to get some better understanding of the apparent low platform, as well as intercepting midden deposits. On the east flank we began with a one by two meter unit at the foot of the mound and expanded this with additional one by two units westward and up the slope of the mound eventually excavating a 2 by 10 meter trench, in the hopes of correlating midden with mound stratigraphy. Finally, a single one by one on the summit of Mound C was begun late in the field season.

Figure 8. Mound C Excavation.

In addition, Edward Henry, John Cappleman, and Joshua Engle performed a down-hole magnetic susceptibility study of Mound C focusing on the northward facing low apron (Figure 10). Data were collected from a transect of 16 core holes beginning west of the mound summit test unit, aligned north to south, with holes spaced 2 meters apart. Briefly, the down hole data revealed a consistent though undulating buried A horizon, as well as a significant concentration of high susceptibility material, probably daub, in the transect across the apron of Mound C (Figure 11).

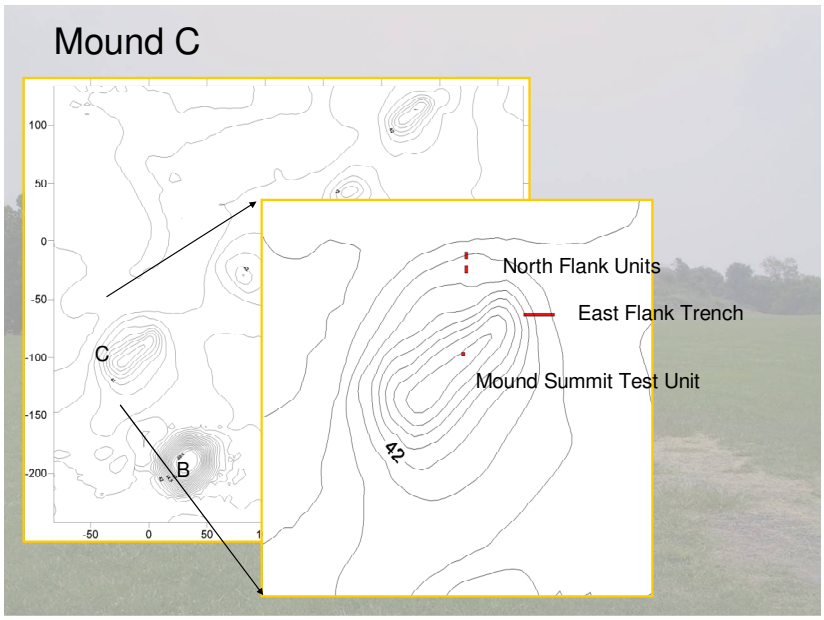

Figure 9. Location of Mound C Units.

Figure 10. Remote sensing of Mound C.

Excavation of the north flank units revealed more than 85-100 cm of wash with lensing and single grain structure (Figure 12). In the down-slope unit, S66W9, the redeposited matrix overlaid the original A horizon at an elevation of 40.35 m. Upslope in S70W9, 100 cm of slopewash overlies a 70-80 cm light midden deposit that appears to be loaded fill. The top of this deposit is approximately 40.4 m in elevation (Figure 13). Thus much of the elevation of the north-facing apron can be accounted for by the mass wasting of sediments from higher up the mound.

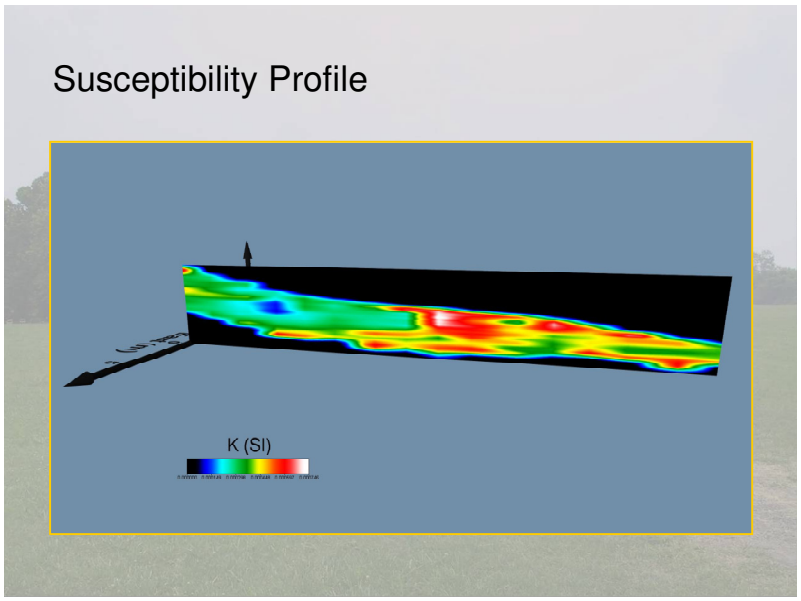

Figure 11. Down Hole Susceptibility Results.

Figure 12. Excavation on the north flank of Mound C.

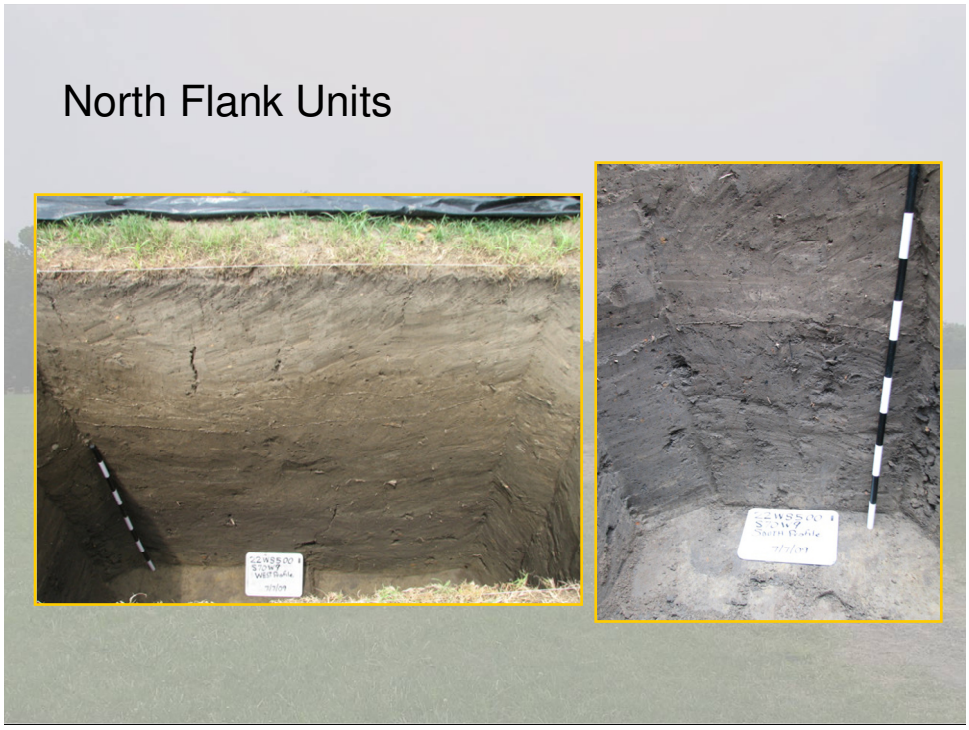

Figure 13. Slopewash revealed in S70W9, north side of Mound C.

The east flank trench produced a much more complicated and not entirely reconcilable picture of Mound C's history (Figure 14). Throughout the trench the upper 40 or so cm consists of slopewash from higher elevations on the mound (Figure 15). The easternmost unit was excavated below the original ground surface, on which lay a layer of charcoal including fragments of poles or saplings at an elevation of 40.37. Above the ground surface is a 20-30 cm stratum of loaded fill surmounted by another 30 cm of midden-stained matrix. One wall trench near the eastern end oriented N-S was excavated from the surface of this construction stage before the midden accumulation above it. At the west end of the excavation and located on this construction stage was built a structure that was subsequently burned, baking the floor beneath it. A wall trench, oriented NW-SE associated with the structure, lay below charcoal filled matrix in the easternmost one by two. This wall trench is clearly part of the burned structure as the baked floor is limited to the east side of it, and the amount of burning and incorporated charcoal is distinctly different within the structure east of the wall, and outside to the west. Baked floor, carbonized debris, and daub from the structure were spread throughout the western 6 meters of the trench and into the west wall.

Figure 14. Mound C east flank trench.

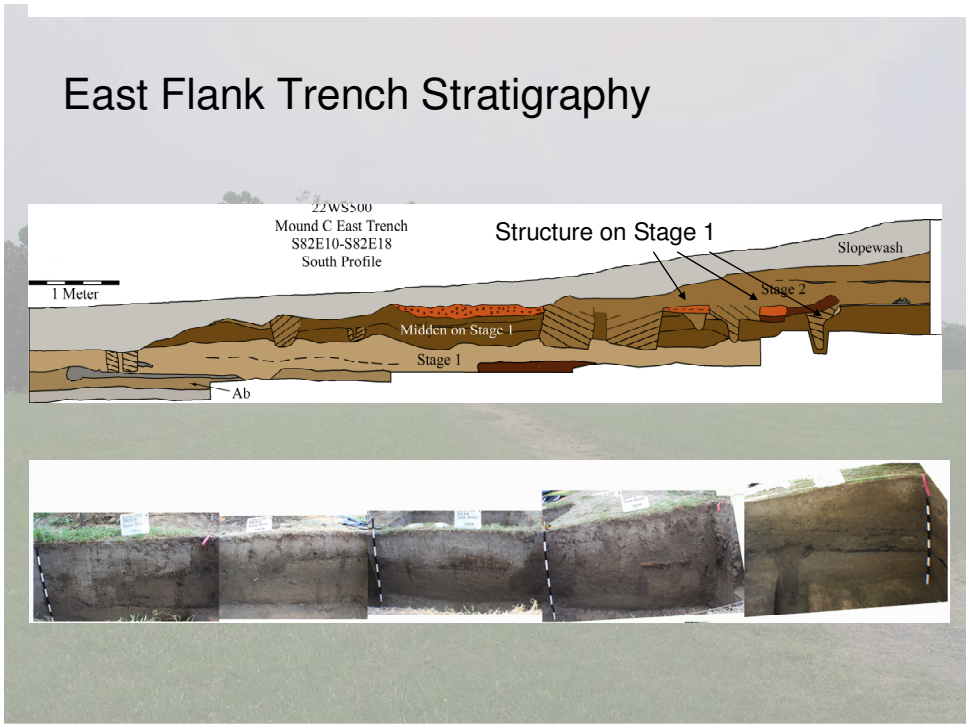

Figure 15. Above, reconstructed stratigraphy, South Profile of Mound C East Trench. Hatched areas are wall trenches. Below photomosaic of south profile.

A second fill unit above the burned structure is preserved in the western four meters of the trench, but has been truncated and covered in slopewash further east. From the summit of this fill were excavated wall trenches representing several structures, cutting through the floor and associated debris of the earlier one (Figure 16). The corners of two superimposed structures, one with a significantly deeper wall trench cut through the initial structure's baked floor and associated daub and charcoal feature to the east. A third unrelated wall trench was excavated through the baked floor. To the east are four additional wall trenches, two of which represent the corner of an open cornered structure, and the other two representing other structures. The more easterly of the two is perpendicular to the wall trench that cuts through the baked floor, suggesting that they could be two sides of the same building. Based on the superposition of the wall trenches in this location, this would be the earliest structure associated with this construction stage, with the open corner structure next, and a still later structure represented by a single trench that cuts through it. Thus four or possibly five structures are associated with the second construction stage.

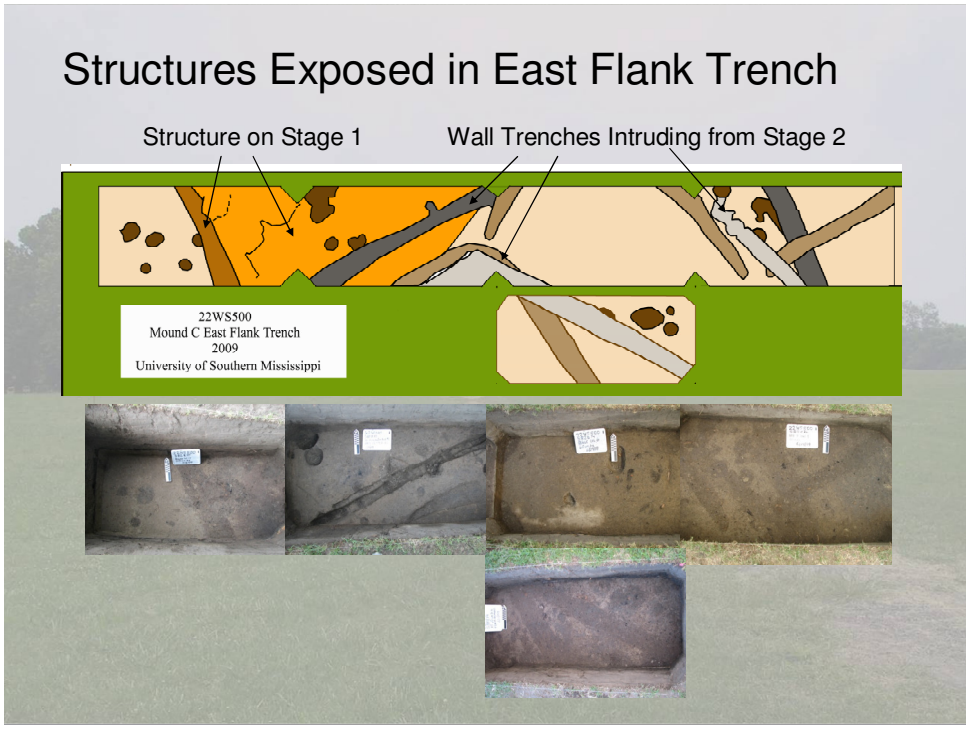

Figure 16. Superimposed wall trenches, and burned structure floor on Stage 1.

It is perplexing to find so much architectural evidence eroding from the flank of the mound, so far offset from the present summit. What seems the best interpretation at the moment is that these two early construction stages represent a low platform or mound that reached a height of at least 1.5 meter, located on the edge of the plaza. Later stages of construction were set further to the southwest rather than being centered over the platform. As we don't know the actual extent of this platform, it is also conceivable that it was large enough to support multiple buildings and that subsequent additions in fact were centered on the platform.

The single summit unit did not penetrate the mound sufficiently to produce any evidence bearing on the question (Figure 17). The unit was begun the final week of the field season and reached only 120 cm below surface. It encountered basket loaded fill from 0 to 50 cm, a 10-20 cm thick layer of daub fragments overlying a layer of ash and charcoal, and below this, basket loaded fill. The surface on which the daub rubble was deposited is approximately 3 m higher than the surface of the first platform stage. A least one and probably more construction stages separate the structure on the first platform stage and that represent by the daub rubble feature at the summit. Given the amount of erosion it is doubtful that the latter represents the final summit structure on the Mound.

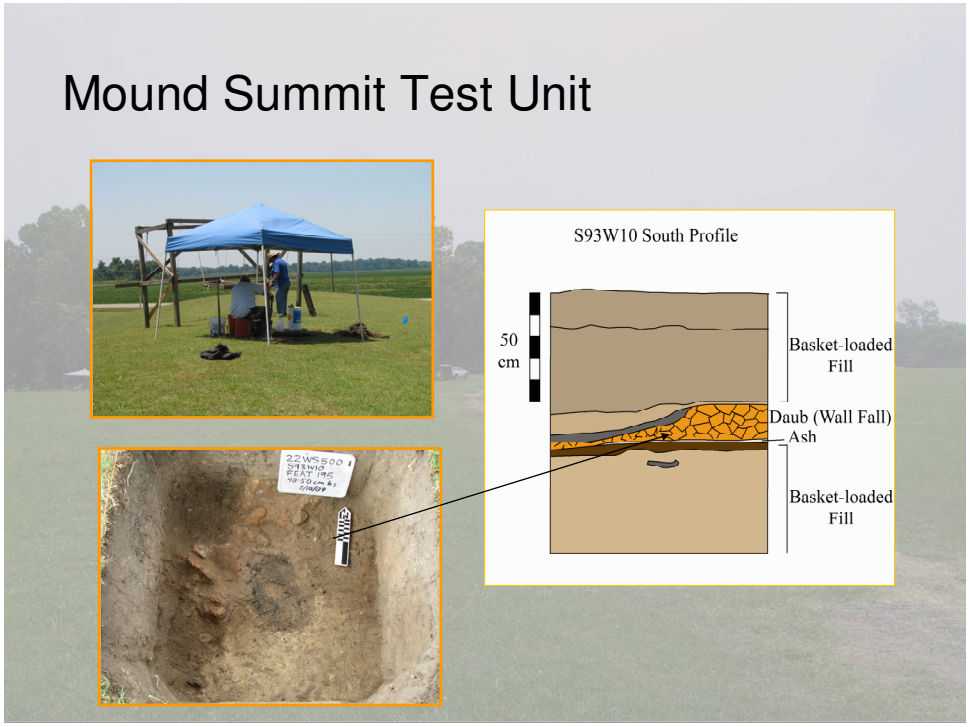

Figure 17. Mound C Summit Unit. Bottom Left, Feature 195.

Both radiocarbon and ceramic evidence suggest the time frame for the construction episodes reconstructed in the foregoing discussion (Figure 18). Three radiocarbon samples have been analyzed by Beta Analytic. These were collected from Feature 131, the charcoal feature lying on the original ground surface at the east end of the east flank trench, a sample associated with the burned structure on the stage one platform, and a third from charcoal just underlying Feature 195, the daub rubble feature in the mound summit test unit, all analyzed by AMS. The rendered radiocarbon ages of 690 $\pm$ 40, 670 $\pm$ 40, and 620 $\pm$ 40 years BP fit the stratigraphic relationships among the samples. Unfortunately, the calibrated date ranges are not so neat. Although they trend in the appropriate direction, the overlap of standard deviations precludes saying other than that they could be contemporaneous. However the ceramic evidence collected thus far seems to disagree with this proposition.

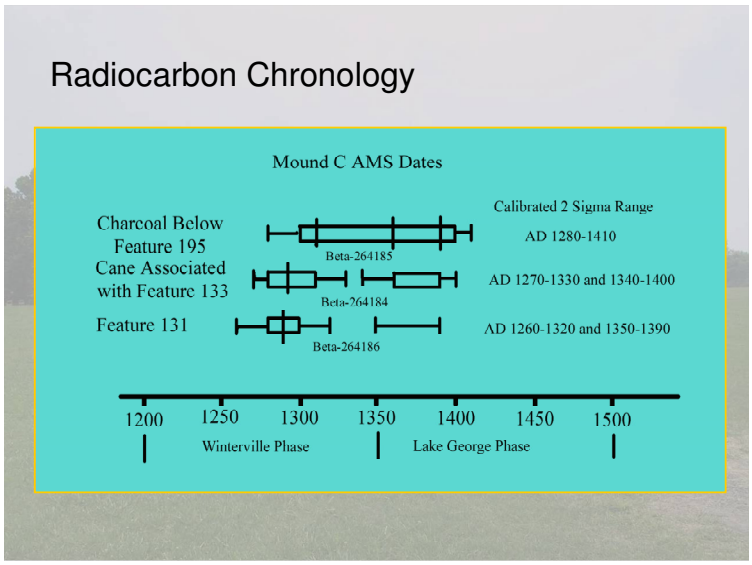

Figure 18. Radiocarbon dates from Mound C.

[SLIDE] To date we have analyzed approximately 3500 sherds from three of the east flank trench, and from the mound summit test unit. Plainware seriation exhibits the transition envisioned for the Late Coles Creek to Mississippian Culture, from predominantly grog tempered *Addis* and *Little Tiger* wares at the early end of the sequence and represented by the premound levels H and I in the east trench, to fully shell-tempered *Yazoo* ware, punctuated mid-way by a brief experimentation with the mixed temper of Greenville ware. Analysis of other contexts at the site indicates that this transition is well underway by A.D.1200 but how rapidly it occurred is still a question.

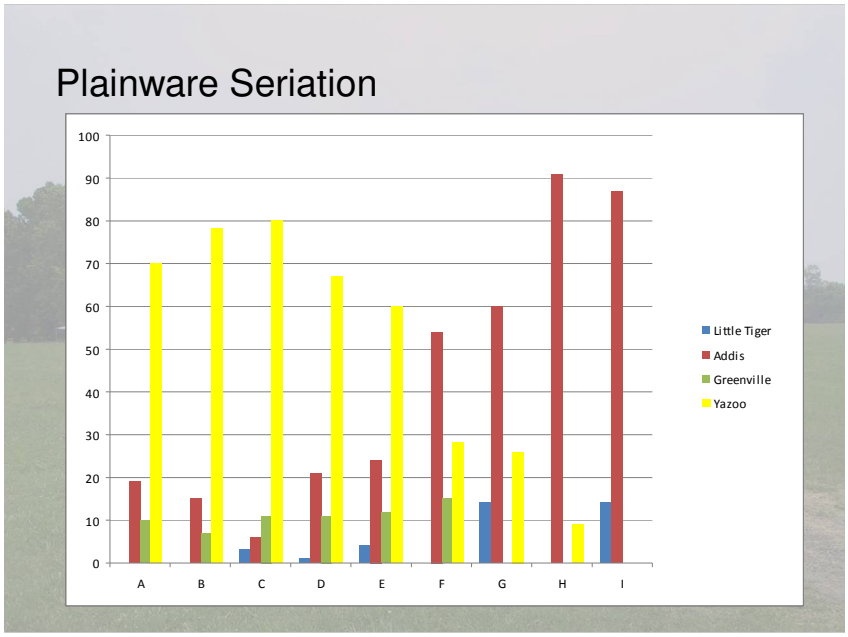

Figure 19. Plainware seriation.

Trends in decorated varieties provide additional evidence for the construction chronology. Excavation levels were lumped according to the stratigraphy outlined earlier. Levels that might be mixed were omitted from this part of the analysis. Since we are largely dealing with construction fills excavated and transported from elsewhere, the earliest occurrence the latest ceramic varieties offers a relatively conservative means of assigning construction events to a phase or subphase.

In the Stage 1 construction fill, Crippen Point ceramics included Mazique Incised, var. Manchac, Cahokia Cord Marked *var. Buford*, Old Town Red*, var. Old Town*, and Powell Plain, *var. Powell* (Figure 20). Early Winterville phase varieties are the latest examples in the Stage 1 fill, and include Ann Engraved, *var. Anna*, and Grace Brushed, *var. Grace.*

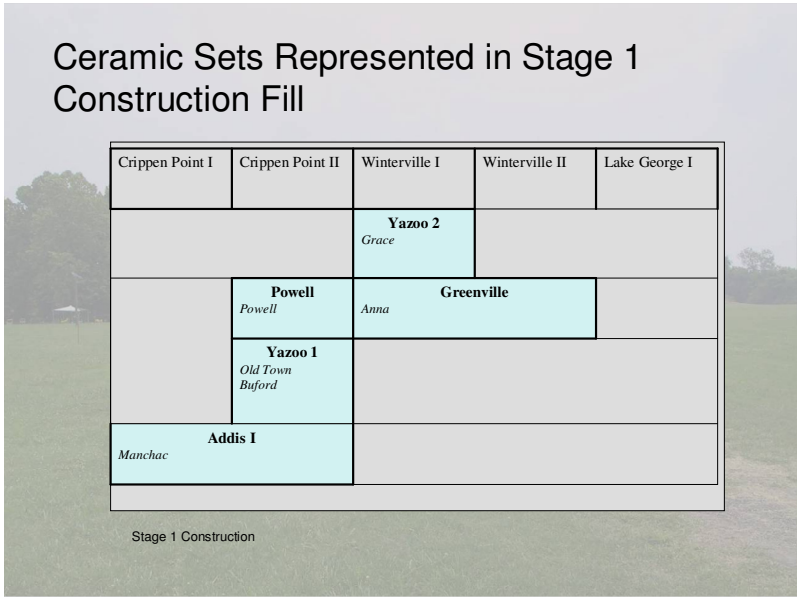

Figure 20. Diagnostic sherds in Stage 1 construction fill.

The Stage1 midden (Figure 21), with which is included the mainly constructional fill at the western end of the trench at the same levels, produced both Crippen Point and Winterville phase markers. Several late Winterville varieties are also present, including Winterville, *var. Winterville*, Parkin Punctated, *var. Hollandale*, and Mound Place Incised, *var. False River.* Assignment of Stage 1 to the late Winterville phase fits with the one sigma range of the radiocarbon date from below the Stage 1 fill of A.D.1280-1300.

Stage 2 construction fill (Figure 22) includes not only Crippen Point and Winterville phase markers but also two varieties of Leland Incised, *Ferris* and *Leland*. These examples are no different from others found at Winterville in good Lake George phase contexts. These sherds suggest the construction of Stage 2 no earlier than the Lake George I sub-phase, sometime probably shortly after the AD1340-1400 span of the late segment of the 2 sigma range for the destruction of the structure atop Stage 1. The earlier range of the date is too early and it is clear that Stage 2 construction began shortly after burning the Stage 1 summit structure.

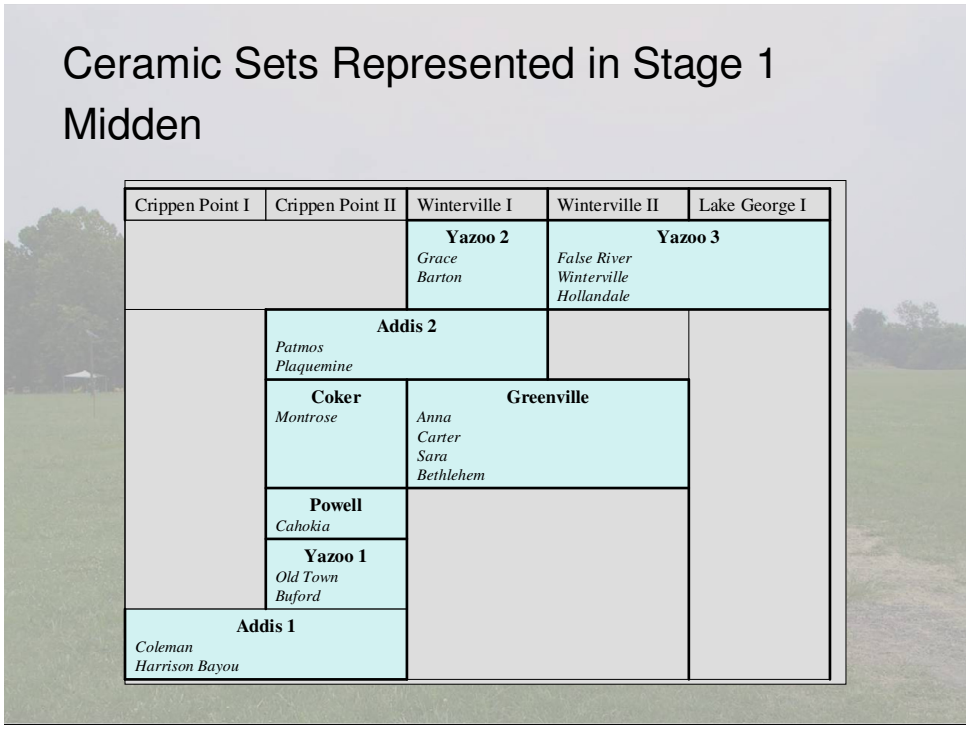

Figure 21. diagnostic sherds in Stage 1 midden.

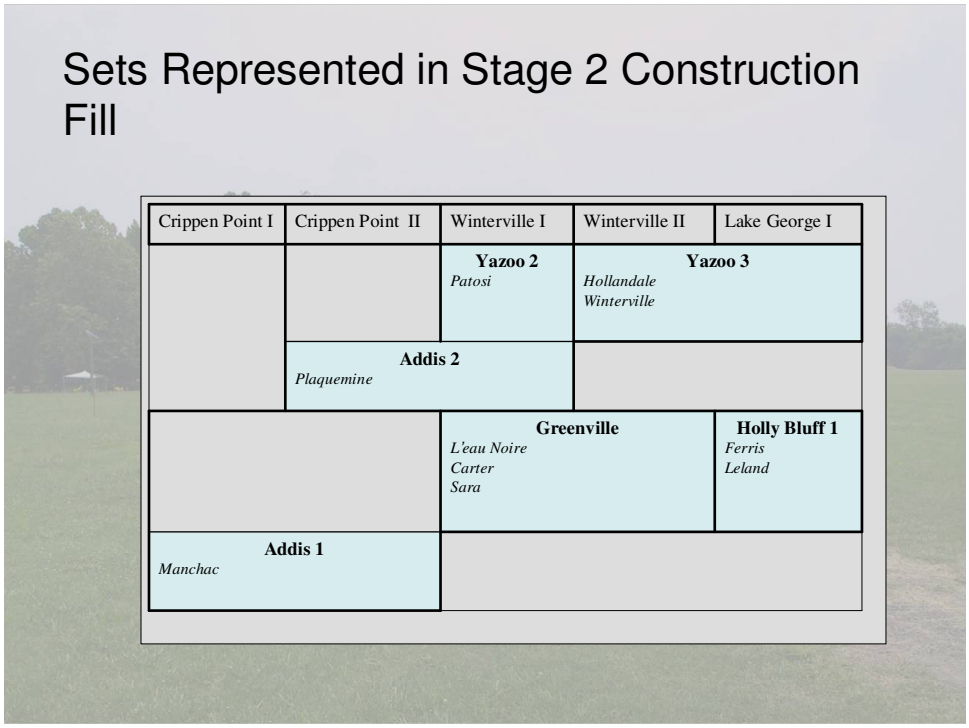

Figure 22. Diagnostic sherds in Stage 2 construction fill.

[Decorated ceramics from the mound summit test unit are exceedingly sparse and all represent inclusions in mound fill (Figure 23). The latest variety in the sample is Parkin Punctated, *var. Hollandale*. While there are no varieties that indicate the Lake George I or later timing of later stages of construction in evidence in the mound summit unit, plainwares, in particular above the daub feature are essentially all shell tempered, indicating that fill was likely being transported from locations occupied late in the Winterville phase or more likely during the Lake George Phase. This would suggest more confidence in the later portion of the date range from the sample below Feature 195.

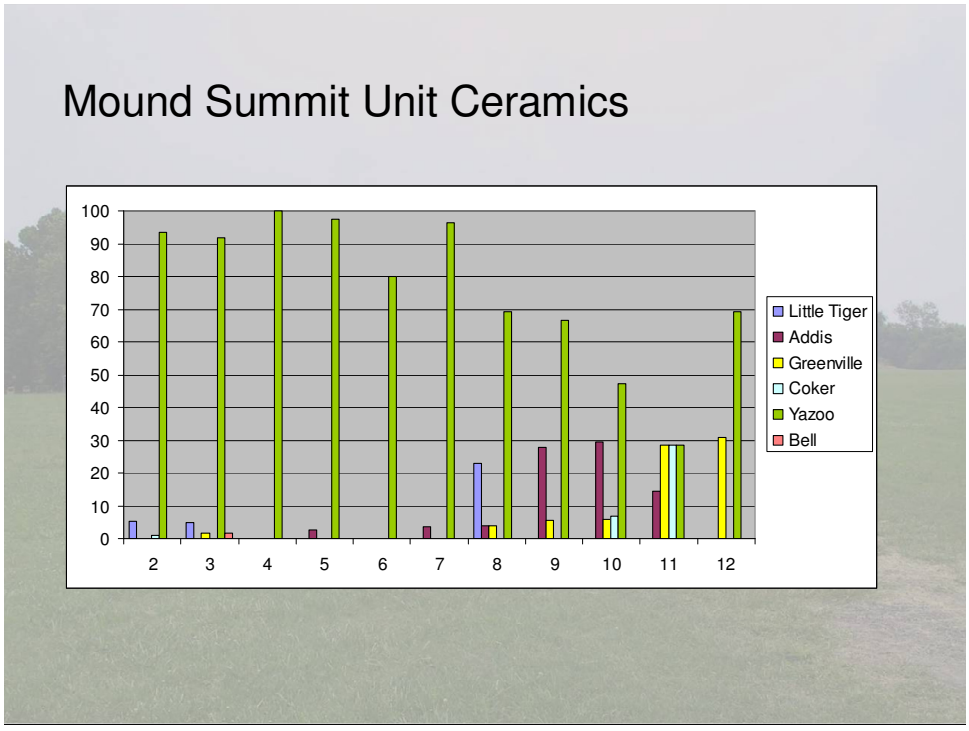

Figure 23. Plainware Seriation, Mound C Summit unit.

At least some of the ceramics in the slope wash in the upper 40 cm of the east flank trench have the likelihood of having been used and discarded on the summit of Mound C and later moved downslope by erosion, while others were merely inclusions in the constructional fill. In addition to those associated with earlier phases, two types are considered to appear late in the Lake George phase, Avenue Polychrome and Carson Red on Buff (Figure 24). Examples of these are similar to those found in other late contexts of the site, and are sufficiently different from the local Bell Plain to suggest they are trade wares. Their presence suggests persistent use of Mound C into the late 15th Century or later.

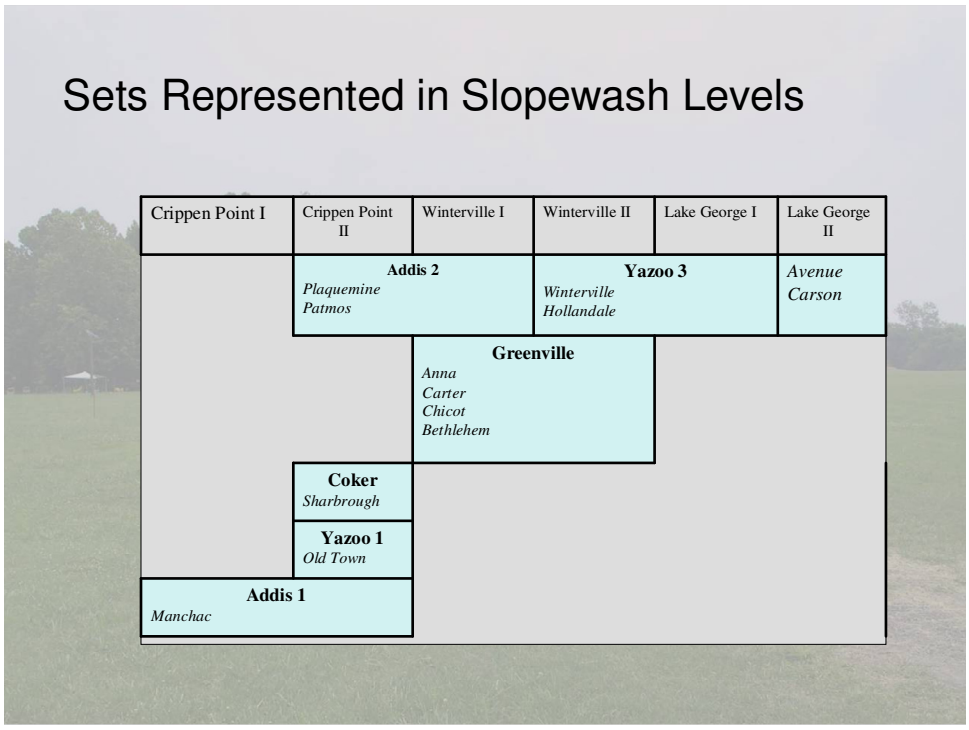

Figure 24. Ceramic diagnostics from slopewash in Mound C East Trench.

In conclusion, despite its present appearance Mound C served as a substructure mound, possibly beginning as a low platform near the plaza and eventually resituated further back with later additions to form its final shape, only to be significantly disfigured during the time after Winterville's abandonment. As to the activities on the summit, we are not far along with analysis, but there are some interesting clues. First, slopewash and midden both produced a very large number of cobble cores and debitage, significantly more than we have found in other contexts. Enough to consider some form of crafting took place there. Most lithic artifacts are local chert, although some non-local material is also present. Secondly, we collected a number of animal head rim adornos, similar to those found on Addis paste at Lake George, but these being shell tempered (Figure 25). Again in numbers considerably greater than from other excavated contexts. These may point to either special function ware or high status vessels. Third, the first discoidal from Winterville was found on the floor of the burned structure atop Stage 1. Like the structure, the discoidal appears to have been intentionally battered and ultimately broken in half prior to discarding it. Finally there is the presence of non-local ceramics including Powell Plain and Morris Plain and possibly traded vessels of Avenue Polychrome and Carson Red on Buff. All point to the possible roles of the residents of Mound C in local ritual life as well as the external networking considered to be the realm of the Mississippian elite.

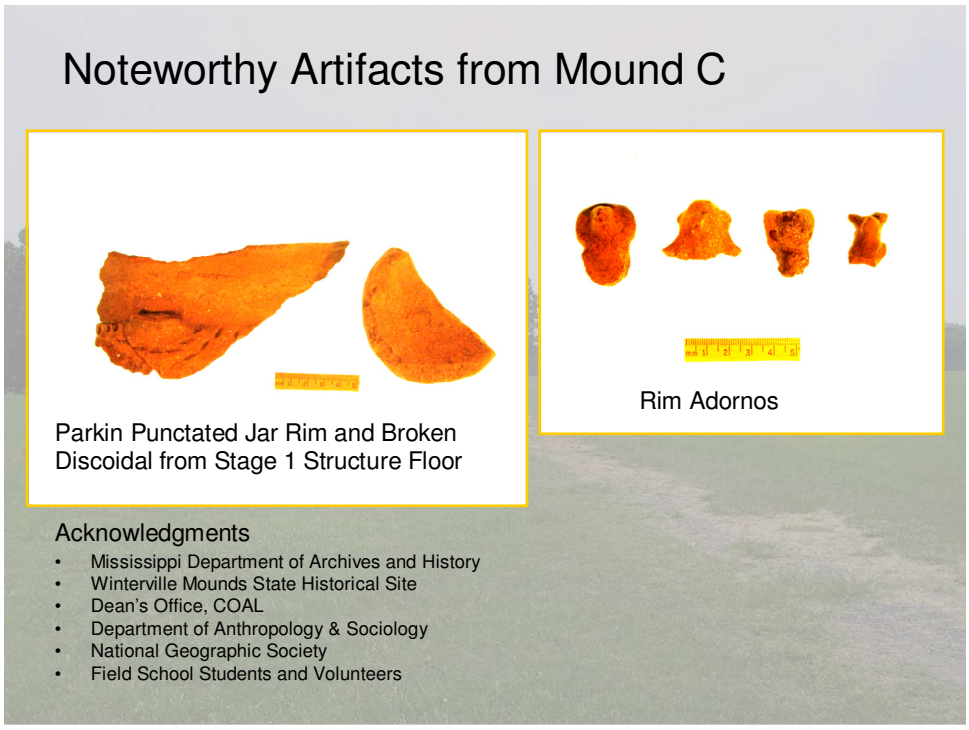

Figure 25. Selected artifacts from Mound C excavation. Left, Parkin Punctated vessel fragment and discoidal from floor of Stage 1 Structure. Right, rim adornos.